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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000458

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS
NSC FOR DORMANDY

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT ESTABLISHES COMMISSION TO
INVESTIGATE RECENT SHOOTING OF LTTE CADRES

REF: COLOMBO 312

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: Three female Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres were shot and injured in the eastern town of Akkaraipattu, south of Ampara, on February 28, 2005. The police have a suspect in custody, allegedly a loyalist to breakaway eastern LTTE rebel Karuna. As with previous attacks on their cadre, the rebel group claimed the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) is complicit in the shooting, a charge government officials deny. In response to the incident and to defuse tensions surrounding alleged GSL involvement, President Kumaratunga appointed a commission to investigate the shooting. Given the government's recent attempts to rebuild the relationship with the Tigers in the post-tsunami environment, the President's efforts are likely aimed at mollifying the rebel group to avoid jeopardizing progress on tsunami reconstruction cooperation. End Summary.

2. (C) FEMALE CADRE ATTACKED: Three female LTTE political officials were shot while riding in a local taxi near the eastern district of Ampara on February 28, 2005. At the request of a doctor in Kalmunai, a city in Ampara district, and with LTTE agreement, two of the injured women were transported by air to a hospital in Colombo for better medical care. Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) spokeswoman Helen Olafs-Dottir told poloff March 2 that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) Peace Secretariat had approved air transport, but that the fixed-wing craft only held two stretchers. She anticipated that a request to airlift the third victim to Colombo for medical treatment would be forthcoming.

3. (C) Olafs-Dottir told poloff that police in the east had a male suspect in custody, someone the LTTE had also identified as the shooter. "The police may have the right guy," Olafs-Dottir said. Olafsdottir said the suspect fled to the Special Task Force (STF) guard post for refuge, but STF officials turned him over to the police. The SLMM was conducting its own inquiry, she said, but despite the pressure on them to issue a ruling in the incident, they were dependent on the police for information and investigation. She thought that the STF was also now under pressure from the GSL to be more pro-active in pursuing paramilitary forces in the east. Police spokesman Rienzie Perera confirmed that the police had detained one man in connection with the shooting, based on allegations of his involvement by the LTTE.

4. (C) LTTE BLAMES GSL: In response to the attack on its cadres, LTTE officials publicly alleged that the GSL was complicit in the February 28 shooting. (Note: The LTTE has struggled to regain control of the eastern province after its eastern commander, Karuna, broke from the rebel group in March 2004. Since the break, the LTTE has consistently charged that cadres loyal to Karuna are being aided by the Sri Lanka military in attacks on LTTE officials. End Note.) Joseph Pararajasingham, an MP with the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) party, also told POL FSN that he believes the shooting could not have occurred without the knowledge of the Sri Lanka military. According to Pararajasingham, the shooting of the women political cadres following the February 7 killing of LTTE eastern political leader Kausalyan (Ref A) is the government's tactic for obstructing the LTTE's entry into mainstream politics.

5. (C) Discounting LTTE reports of GSL involvement in the shooting, Sri Lanka Army spokesman Brigadier Daya Ratnayake told poloff in a March 2 conversation that GSL security forces would not do such a "stupid thing" to imperil the GSL-LTTE ceasefire agreement. He said the LTTE and Karuna loyalists continued to fight each other in both LTTE- and GSL-controlled areas in the east. Since LTTE attempts to reclaim control in the east were not successful, the rebel group was now blaming the government for the violence in the province.

6. (C) PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE: In response to the February 28 attack on the three women, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed a presidential commission to investigate the incident. Presidential advisor Nigel Hatch told POL FSN on March 2 that two high court

judges will chair the commission, the establishment of which is meant to assuage LTTE beliefs that the government was involved. Hatch admitted to the President's concern about the current security environment in the east, adding that the GSL has little knowledge of the real situation on the ground.

17. (C) COMMENT: The President's formation of a commission to investigate this latest incident of violence in the east sends a strong message that the GSL wants to keep avenues of communication open with the LTTE, especially as discussions continue on a tsunami coordination mechanism. Less clear is whether the LTTE will accept the conclusions of the commission. End Comment.

LUNSTEAD